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ABSTRACT

Part of an international series of amply illustrated, colorful, small-sized books for children ages 5 to 10, this volume is designed to enhance learning and serve as an educational resource. Aspects of daily life along the Zaire River in Central Africa are described. Questions such as what can be seen along the banks, and why is market day so important receive answers. Illustrations appear throughout the book. (DB)

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Living in The Heart of Africa

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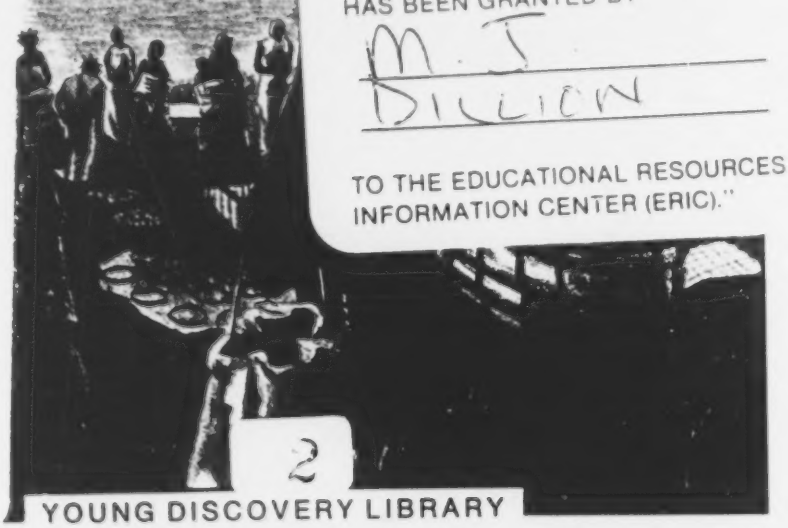

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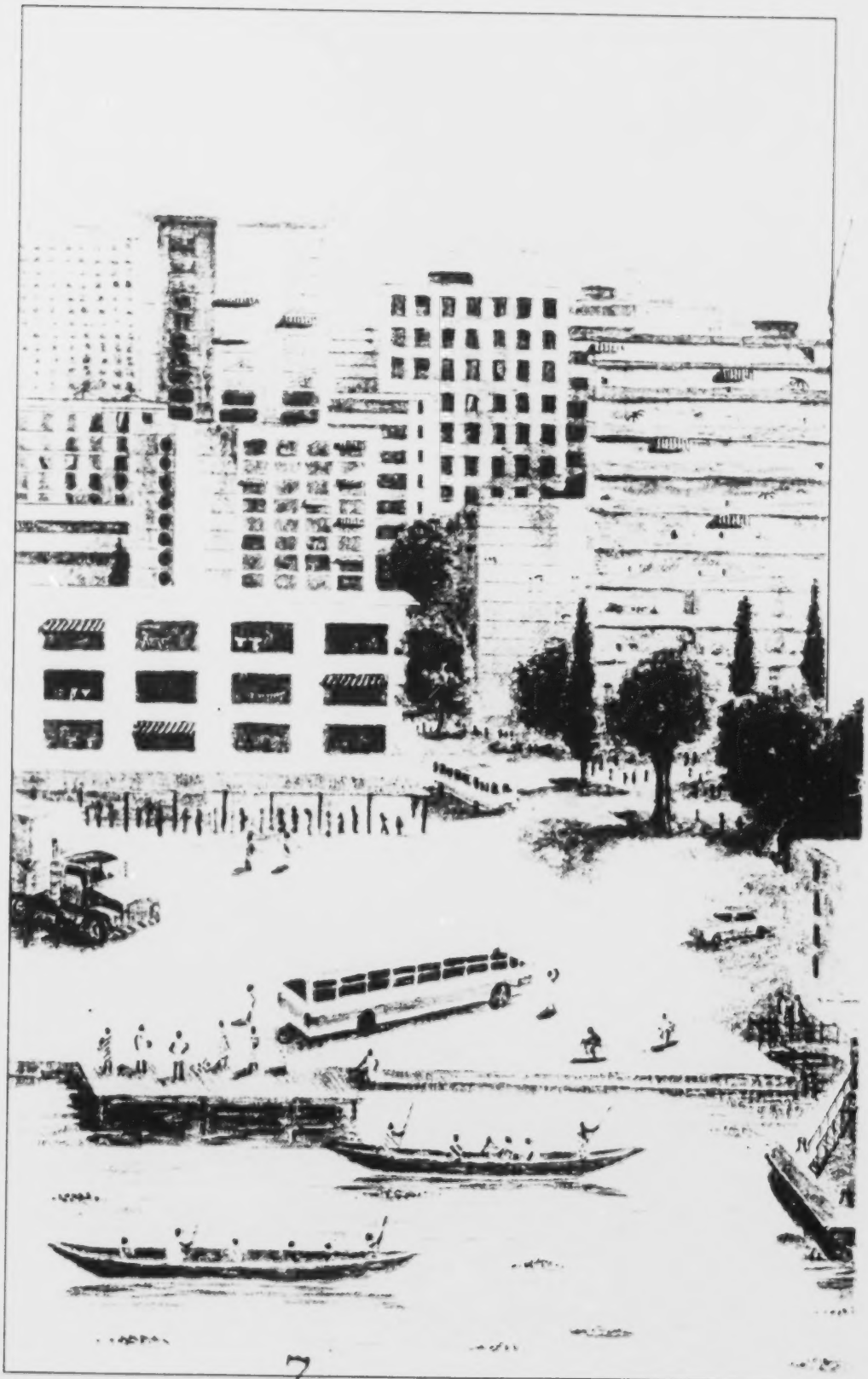
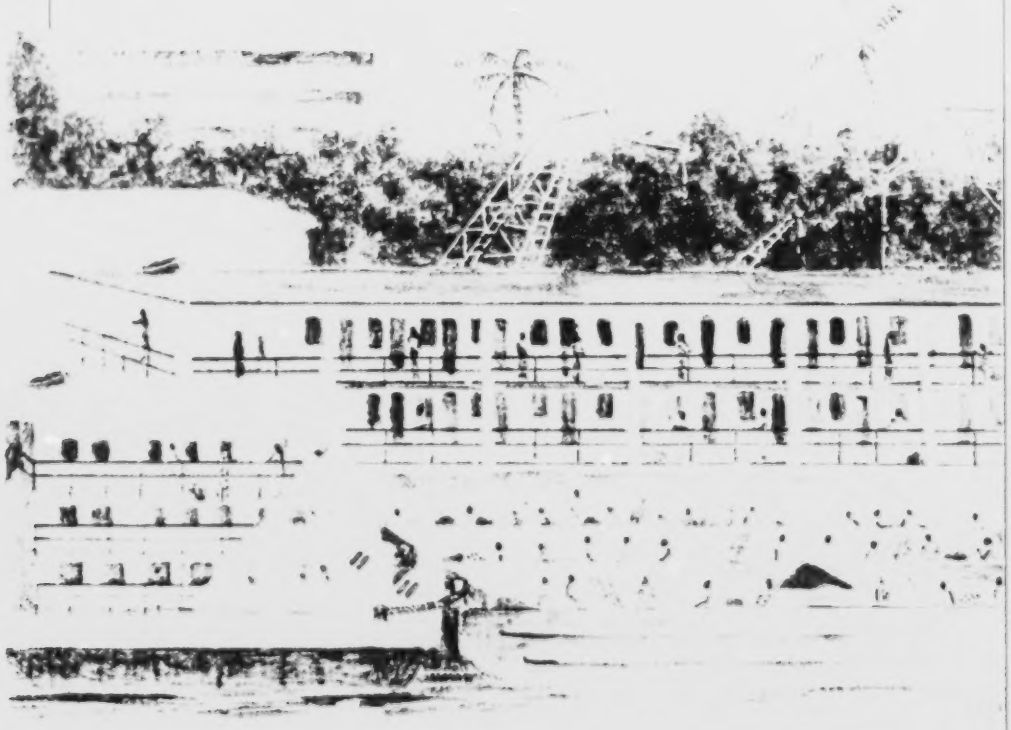


All aboard for a trip up the river!
We leave from Kinshasa, capital of Zaire, in Central Africa. On the banks of the mighty Zaire River, modern buildings and mud-brick houses stand side by side.
Since dawn the port has been jammed with people in colorful dress, waiting to board the boat. A hot sun beats down. People in dugout canoes glide up and down the river, watching the hustle and bustle.



The equator cuts across the enormous African continent, which is 5,000 miles long and 4,700 miles wide.

The Zaire River was once known as the Congo River. It forms a 2,900-mile-long arc which crosses the equator in two places. But the Zaire is only good for boats between Kinshasa and Kisangani, where it is as wide as nine miles in spots.

The rest of the river is too dangerous for boats because of waterfalls and wild rapids.

In the desert, nomads are always moving their herds in search of watering holes.

On the savanna, lions hide in the tall grass and stalk antelope or giraffes.

In the tropical rain forest are tall trees, vines, monkeys, and butterflies.

There are two main deserts in Africa:
The Sahara in the north and the Kalahari in the south. Not much rain falls, and little grows there.

agama

Closer to the equator, it rains more. **This is the Savanna**, or grasslands, where tall grasses and a few trees grow.

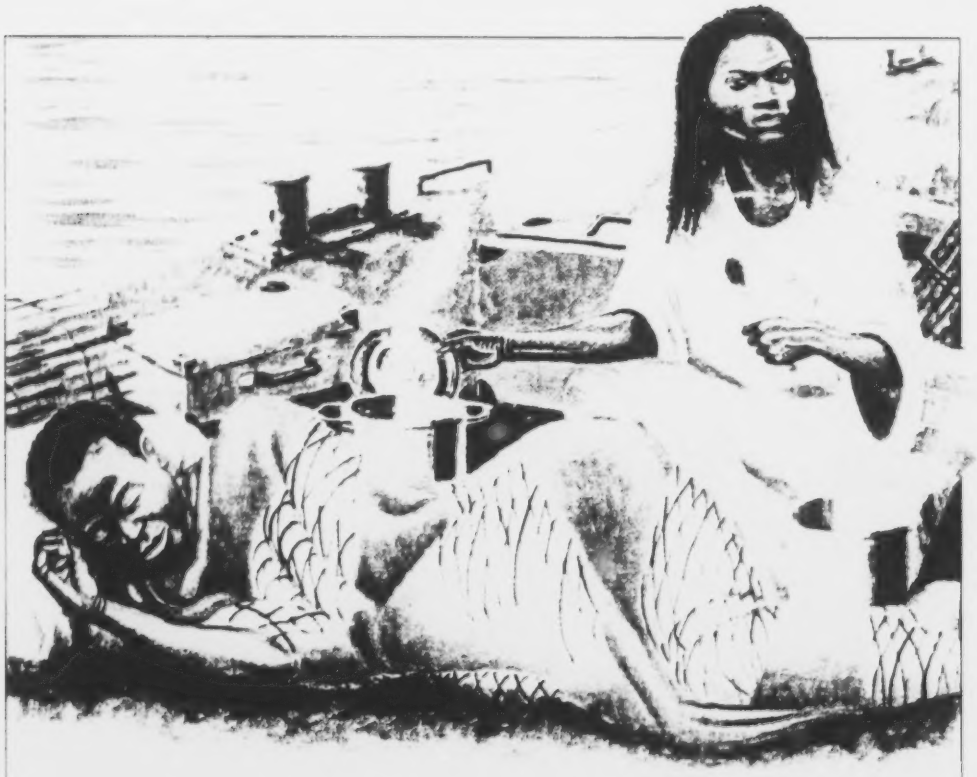
oryx

Very near the equator,
when it rains, it pours!
The air is hot and sticky, and the sky is often full of low, heavy clouds.
This part of the country is covered by the great equatorial forest,
the tropical rain forest.

gorilla

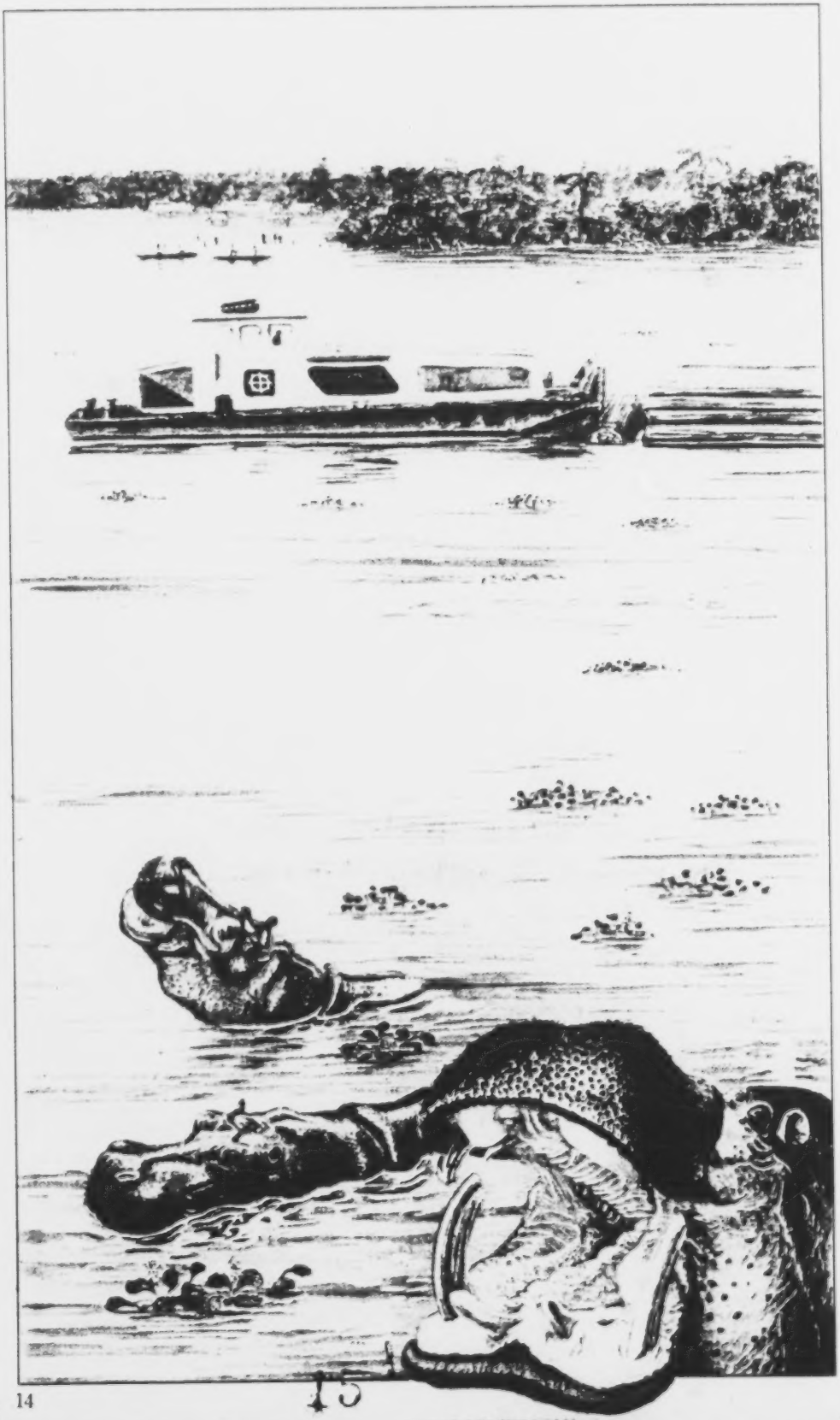
python

The boat is ready to leave! Two or three thousand people hurry on board with their pots and pans, sleeping mats and baskets of food; not to mention their chickens and goats!
Everyone rushes to find a comfortable spot: the trip will take a whole week, and there will only be a few stops.

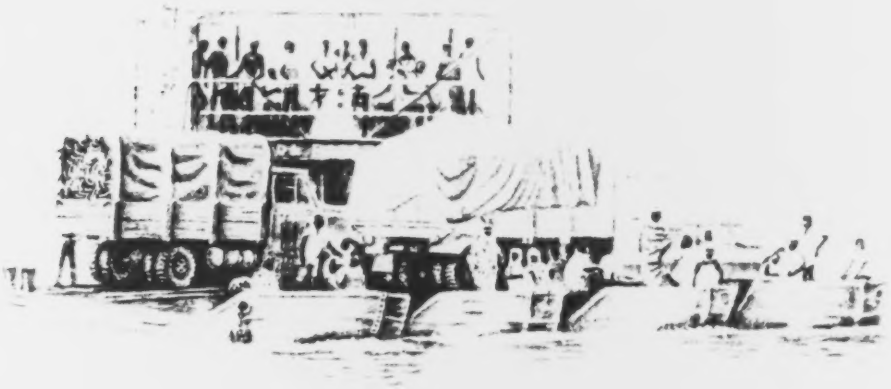


A long whistle blast and the last packages are tossed aboard. People who came to say goodbye now leave the boat. Sometimes, in all the shoving, someone or something falls into the water! Now it's anchors aweigh!

As the boat departs, the passengers make themselves at home. They unroll sleeping mats, cook dinner, play cards, and even dance to music from transistor radios. It is like a floating city with a captain for a mayor, heading slowly up the muddy river.



River traffic is heavy and the captain must be on the alert.
Watch out for those log rafts being floated downriver!



Look out for those sandbars! You never know where they will be—they keep shifting. And what about those pesky water plants that get tangled in the boat's propellers? Some of those plants were brought to Africa by Europeans. They grew too fast in this climate and now nobody can seem to get rid of them.
The captain must think about the safety of his boat and his passengers at all times.

The okapi is a strange animal. It has the head of a giraffe, the body of a donkey, and the legs of a zebra.

Near Mbandaka, the halfway point of our trip, the forest gets thicker. There are towering mahogany trees whose wood is used for making furniture. There are palm trees and kapok trees whose pods are full of a fluff, like cotton, that we use to stuff pillows. In the tangle of vines hang other growing things, such as beautiful orchids and poisonous plants.

There are giant beetles, termites and army ants which can eat a whole person. And butterflies: the African giant swallowtail has a wingspan of up to 10 inches.
You might also get to see a rare animal which lives only in Zaire: the okapi.

Here's a village of huts with mud walls and thatched palm roofs. There are no roads or trains. Everyone travels on the river. When our boat arrives, it's a big event!

The villagers run to the shore and wave. Some paddle their dugout canoes close to the boat to sell catfish or monkey and crocodile meat!

20

Two important people in the village are the chief and the witch doctor, who gets rid of evil spirits. Everyone has a job to do. The men cut down trees and clear the forest with machetes. This provides firewood and space for new huts and gardens. They fish and go hunting with their little dogs by their side.

The villagers work out their problems under the "palaver tree." Palaver means to discuss.

The women grow a root vegetable, called **manioc**, in their gardens. They carry large bundles of it in the heat. In the village, the root is soaked for four or five days before eating. The women also fetch water and firewood, and wash clothes in the river. Much of the time they work with their babies strapped to their backs.

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Market day is a big event!
Early in the morning, when it is not too hot, the women come to buy and sell. They display their wares in baskets, basins, or on pieces of cloth spread on the ground. There are delicious fruits: mangoes, bananas, pineapples, papayas, oranges, limes, coconuts...

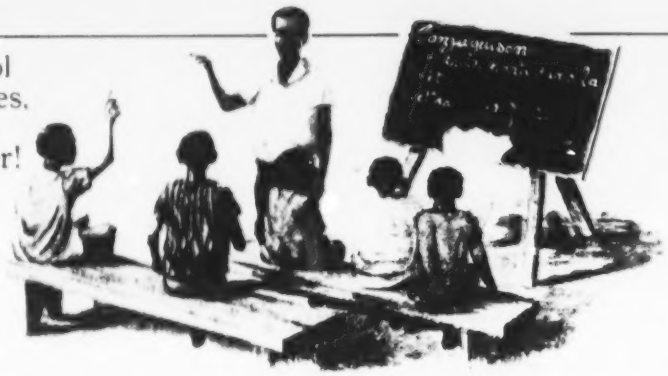
There are vegetables such as manioc, yams, or sweet potatoes.
They sell yards of brightly colored cloth to wrap around their bodies.
You can also buy fish or smoked crocodile, monkey meat, antelope, or elephant.
Care for a dried caterpillar?

Women skillfully carry enormous pots on their heads.

A calabash

At an early age children begin to help in the work. The girls, wearing hair braided in many styles, help their mothers pound the manioc. The manioc meal is rolled into balls, wrapped inside a big banana leaf, and steamed over the fire. It is eaten with a spicy sauce. Boys learn to hunt and fish by going out with their fathers. They practice animal calls so they can lure game into traps or shoot it with arrows. All of the children are taught to respect their parents and to help others in the village.

A village school
is a few benches,
a blackboard,
and the teacher!



What about school? Many villages don't have one. Then the children must walk for an hour or two to another village. When they get home in the evening they are often too tired to finish their homework. For high school they have to go down river to a large town.

When the children have a little
free time, they make their own toys.

A good crop, a wedding, a new baby: all call for a celebration! The villagers put on carved wooden masks, feathers and animal skins. They paint their faces and bodies. Then they dance all night to the rhythm of drums. Every village has dances that show the courage of its warriors in battle and the defeat of their enemies.

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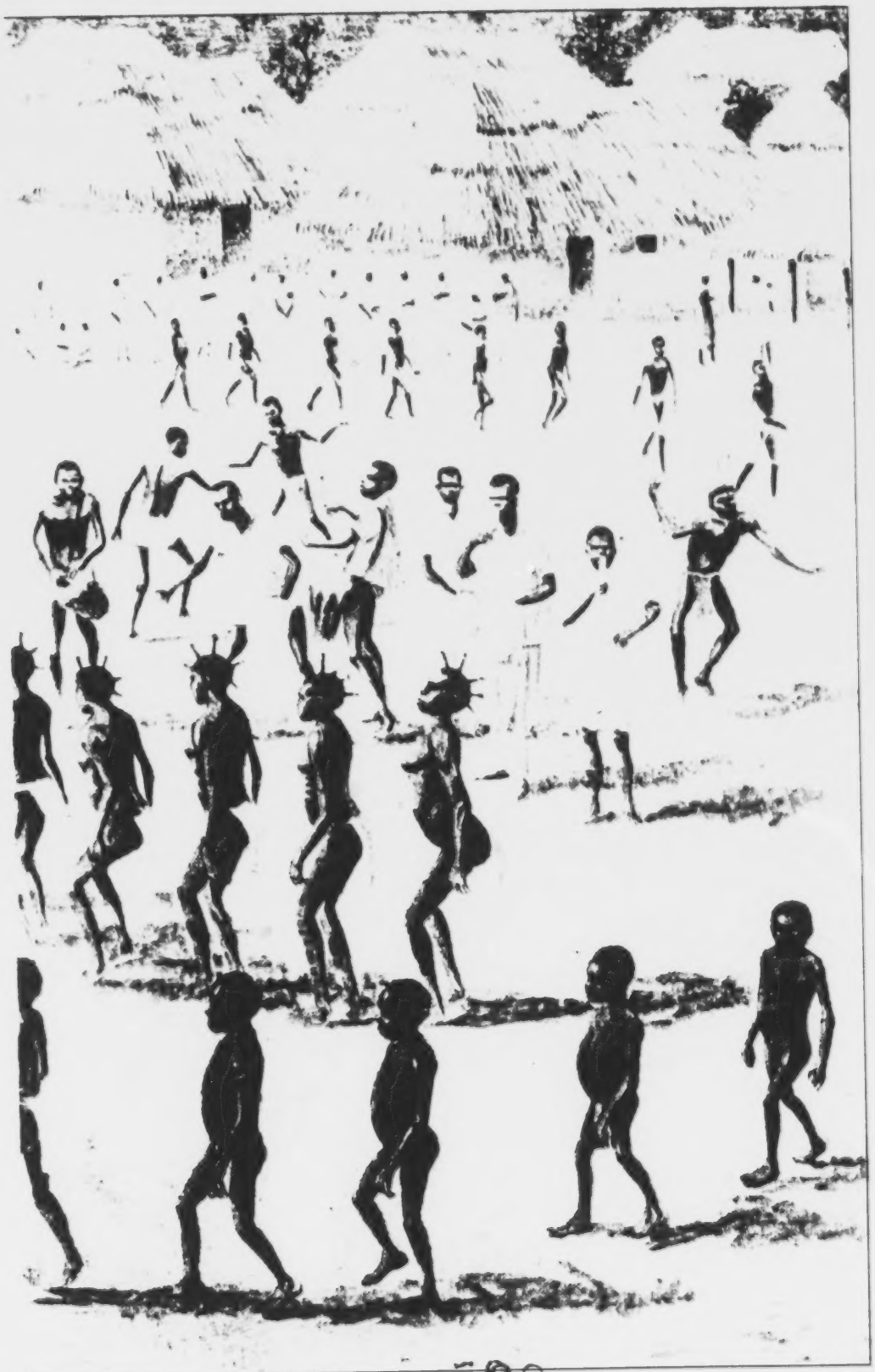
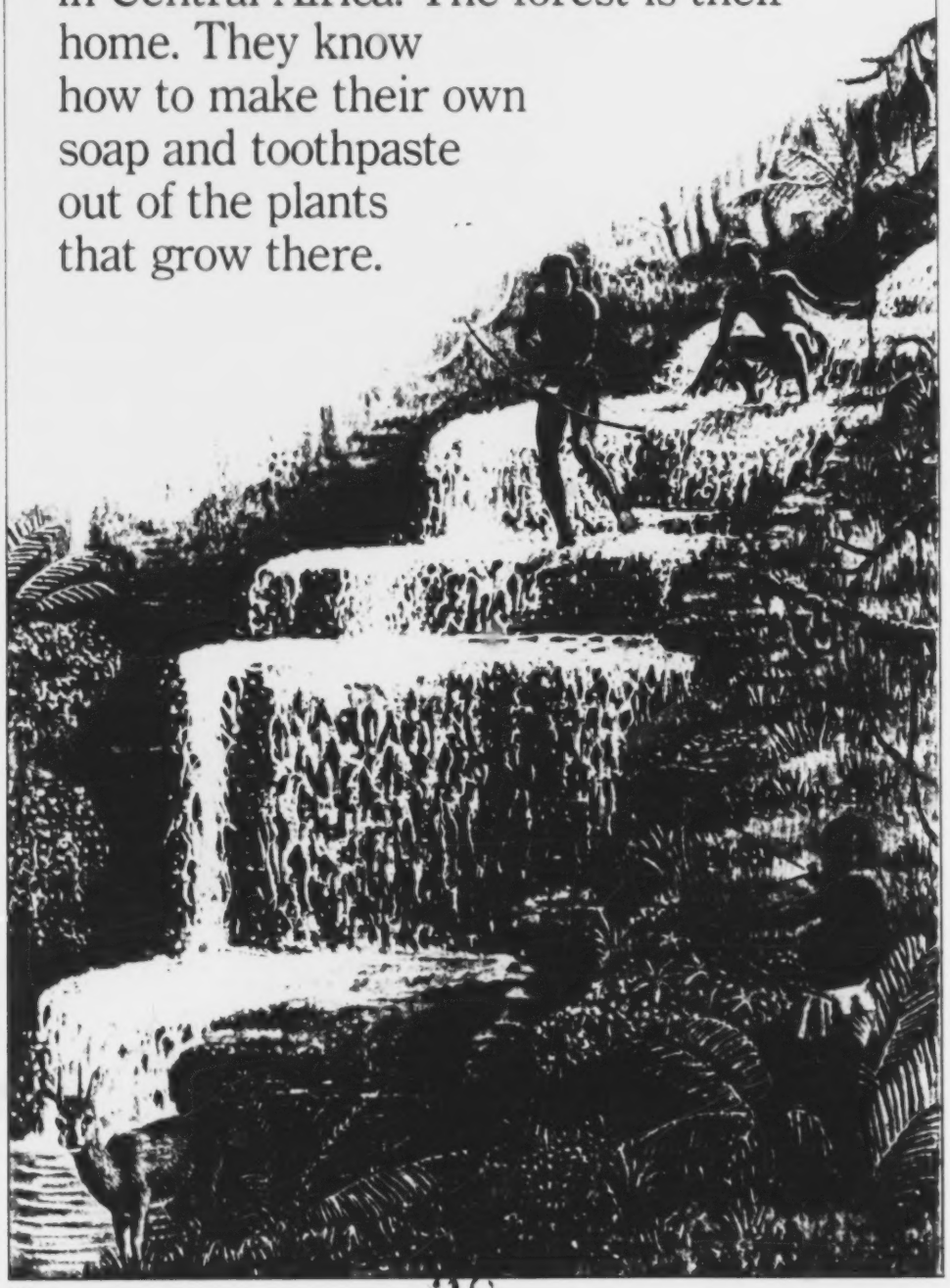


Deep in the forest live the Pygmies. They are a tribe of small people who do not grow more than 4½ feet tall. They were probably the first people to live in Central Africa. The forest is their home. They know how to make their own soap and toothpaste out of the plants that grow there.



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Pygmies live in huts made of curved branches covered with big leaves. They catch animals and gather fruit in the forest. Roasted caterpillars are a favorite. Pygmies are skillful as dancers and musicians and they know what plants make good medicines. Every few months they move to a new area.

Hunters make poison-tipped arrows to stun game.

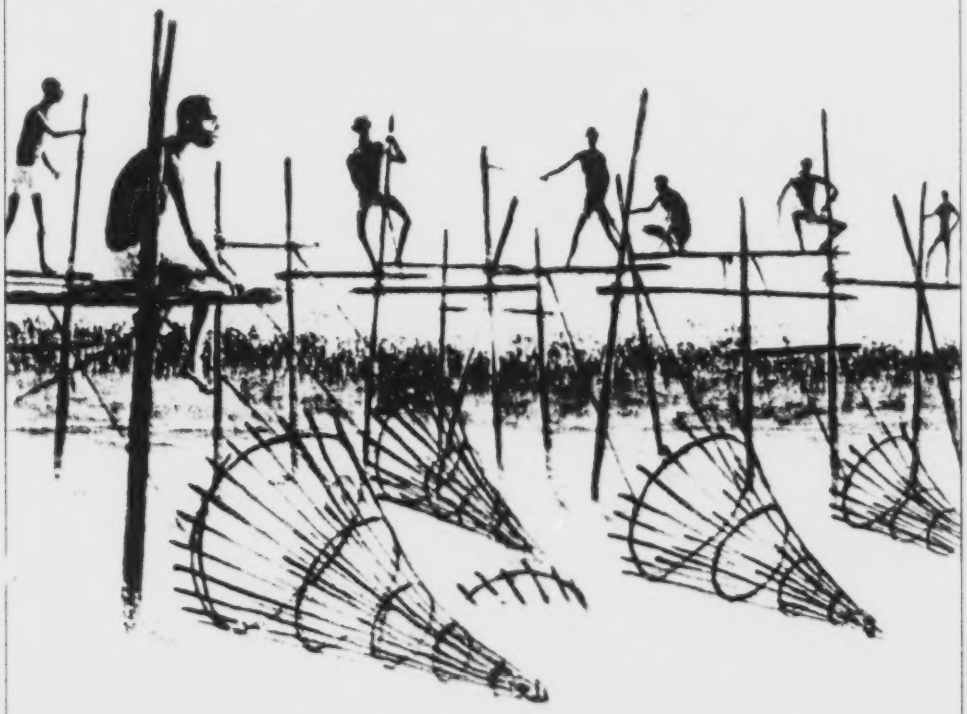
How do you catch a fish?

Some men fish from dugouts using rods with single hooks. (Often these fishermen gather to race each other.)

Others do not wait for the fish to come to them...they go to the fish!

This fisherman swims underwater and expertly spears his dinner.

And there are other ways to fish. A few miles from Kisangani, the last stop on our trip, the river is full of waterfalls and rapids. Here fishermen hang long baskets from platforms. The platforms are made by lashing tree trunks with vines.



Every so often, a fisherman will dive into the water to check the baskets. If there are any fish inside, they pull up the baskets fast! Sometimes they catch a giant two-hundred pound catfish.

If we leave the river and go down a dusty red road, we will arrive at Virunga National Park. The park has volcanos and lakes and something special. It is the only place in the world where you can see mountain gorillas in the wild.

On the shores of the lakes, there are thousands of birds. Pelicans with long beaks and baldheaded storks wait patiently, hoping for scraps from fishing boats. The catch is smoked and shipped to markets in town, or grilled and eaten right by the lake.

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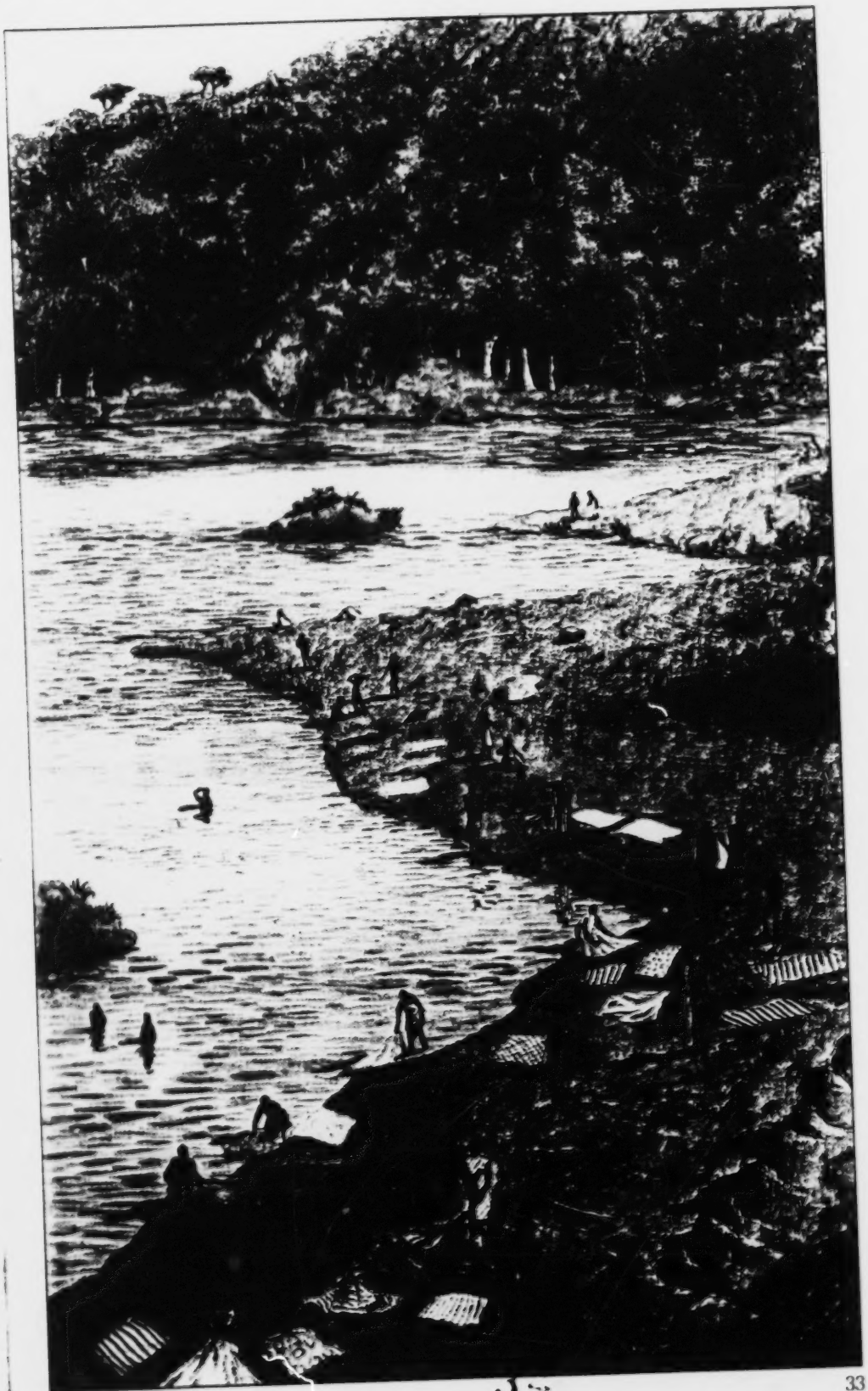

Virunga may be the most beautiful animal preserve in the world. Elephants, water buffalo, antelope, lions, leopards and hippopotamuses all live there. They are protected, but illegal hunters, **poachers**, still try to kill these fine animals. Park rangers chase and arrest poachers.

On the outskirts of a village there are some tame animals. You can touch them but it still is funny to be nose to nose with an elephant! In the bush it is better to keep your distance...

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Preoccupation

Dust is in my eye,
A crocodile has me by the leg,
A goat is in the garden,
A porcupine is cooking in the pot,
Meal is drying in the pounding rock,
The King has summoned me to court,
And I must go to the funeral of my
mother-in-law:
In short, I am busy.

A Mbundu poem

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discovery for children five years
old and upwards.

- **What river runs through the Heart of Africa?**
- **What can you see along the banks?**
- **How do villagers live along the river?**

- **What do Pygmies eat?**
- **Why is market day so important?**
- **What do children make their toys from?**

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